



## The Facts about Influenza

**Seasonal (or common) flu** is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

**Avian (or bird) flu** is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity and no vaccine is available.

**Pandemic flu** is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu.

Seasonal Influenza	Pandemic Influenza
Occurs yearly, October - March	Occurs in cycles of 10-40 years, any time of the year
Affects 5-20% of the population, particularly the elderly, infants, and people with existing medical conditions	Affects 25-50% of the population, particularly healthy young adults
In the US, kills 36,000-40,000, with most deaths in the high risk groups	In the US, 70,000 deaths (1957-58) to 500,000 deaths (1918)
Illness usually lasts 5-7 days with full recovery by 2 weeks	More severe illness, for longer period
Vaccine available based upon currently circulating virus strains	Caused by a new virus strain, no vaccine would be immediately available. New vaccine production requires at least six months.
Antiviral drugs have proven useful against current virus strains	Antiviral drugs may be in short supply or may not be as effective against a pandemic strain

### Symptoms of Influenza

Fever, usually high (above 100.4°), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches.

## **How Does Flu Spread?**

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

## **How do I Protect Myself Against Seasonal Influenza AND Pandemic Influenza?**

1. If available, get vaccinated
2. Practice Cough Etiquette
  - **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze—throw the tissue away after you use it.
  - **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
  - **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
  - **If you get the flu, stay home from work, school, and social gatherings.** In this way you will help prevent others from catching your illness.
  - **Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way

## **Avian Influenza H5N1**

### **What is avian influenza (bird flu)?**

Avian influenza is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. Avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them.

### **How does avian influenza spread among birds?**

Domesticated birds may become infected with avian influenza virus through direct contact with infected waterfowl or other infected poultry or through contact with surfaces (such as dirt or cages) or materials (such as water or feed) that have been contaminated with the virus.

### **Do avian influenza viruses infect humans?**

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but more than 180 confirmed cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

**How do people become infected with avian influenza viruses?**

Humans become infected from direct or close contact with infected poultry (e.g., domesticated chicken, ducks, and turkeys) or surfaces contaminated with secretions and excretions from infected birds.

**What are the symptoms of avian influenza in humans?**

Symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical human influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress syndrome), and other severe and life-threatening complications.

**How is avian influenza detected in humans?**

A laboratory test is needed to confirm avian influenza in humans.

**What are the implications of avian influenza to human health?**

Two main risks for human health from avian influenza are 1) the risk of direct infection when the virus passes from the infected bird to humans, sometimes resulting in severe disease; and 2) the risk that the virus – if given enough opportunities – will change into a form that is highly infectious for humans and spreads easily from person to person.

**Does the current seasonal influenza vaccine protect me from avian influenza?**

No. Influenza vaccine for the 2005-06 season does not provide protection against avian influenza.

**Should I wear a surgical mask to prevent exposure to avian influenza?**

Currently, wearing a mask is not recommended for routine use (e.g., in public) for preventing influenza exposure.

**Is there a risk for becoming infected with avian influenza by eating poultry?**

No. There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry or eggs can be a source of infection for avian influenza viruses.

**We have a small flock of chickens. Is it safe to keep them?**

Yes. In the United States there is no need at present to remove a flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian influenza. The U.S. Department of Agriculture monitors potential infection of poultry and poultry products by avian influenza viruses and other infectious disease agents.

**What precautions can be taken to reduce the risk for infection from wild birds in the United States?**

As a general rule, the public should observe wildlife, including wild birds, from a distance. Avoid touching wildlife. If there is contact with wildlife do not rub eyes, eat, drink, or smoke before washing hands with soap and water. Do not pick up diseased or dead wildlife.

For more information see <http://www.sanantonio.gov/health> or call 210-207-5779